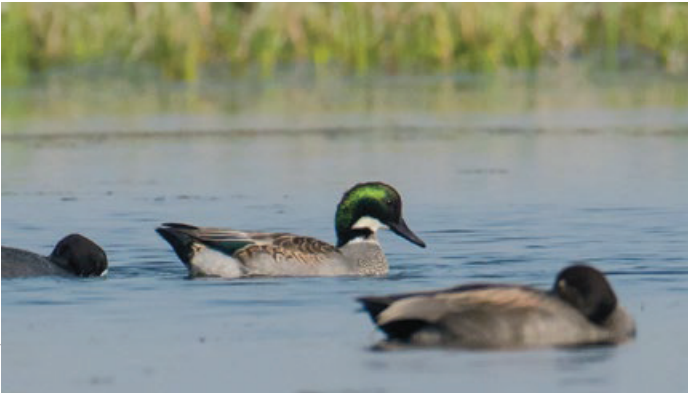


## Sighting of Falcated Duck *Anas falcata* at Nal Sarovar: a first photographic record from Gujarat

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Early in the morning on 20 November 2018, we went on a family birding trip at Vadla Wetland. It is near the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, and is a large wetland. There were many water birds in the area. We had to observe them with binoculars because they were scattered and very far away. While scanning groups of dabbling ducks (*Anas* sp.), the first author (PM) spotted an unusual, green-headed duck. It was foraging in shallow water, and was surrounded by several Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*), Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) and Gadwall (*Anas strepera*). At first, we thought that it was a Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). But, on further observation, it was clear that this was a male Falcated Duck (*Anas falcata*).

We observed its diagnostic features, like a large head, which is metallic bronze-green, chestnut-purple crown with a bushy crest and mane – like a nuchal crest, which is diagnostic for the male in breeding plumage of this species. It has black-and-grey inner secondaries hanging off its back, which are elongated and falcated (sickle-shaped), which give this species its name; the throat and fore-neck is white, with a narrow dark green collar at base; the bill is black, body is grey, vermiculated with black, and the speculum is glossy black and green (Carboneras & Kirwan 2018). Except for the sickle-shaped secondaries, many other features observed in this individual were matching with a Falcated Duck and the identification was readily confirmed as a male Falcated Duck. It was probably not a full adult as some retained juvenile feathers were present on the flanks and scapulars. Though ageing of Falcated Ducks is complicated (Martin & Garner 2012), here, the scapulars were retained juvenile scapulars, which were brown with pale brown fringes, which indicated that this individual was possibly a first-winter bird.

Simply put, the Falcated Duck was a strikingly beautiful duck. It was busy in mainly foraging and preening, and feeding

hurriedly while swimming. It kept swimming in the far corner of the wetland covered with tall grass, and was visible only from the front side. It never left the group of other ducks, even though at the same time was hostile to them. We observed that the Falcated Duck often drove away other ducks which came near to it and did not tolerate other ducks feeding near itself.

We stayed there for a while in the hope of getting a decent photograph of this individual, in case it came any nearer. But, it never left that particular patch of marshy area, keeping close to emergent vegetation all the time. We were able to get some photographs, which further confirmed the identification.

Meanwhile, our daughter Geet (the third author) spotted another interesting bird in the nearby marshes, which turned out to be a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*). There were two individuals and we heard them calling several times. The birds were very shy, appearing and disappearing into the reeds while expertly catching small, silver-coloured fish from the water. We then took some photographs of the Water Rails. However, the Falcated Duck did not come any closer and finally, we left the place.

On studying published literature, we found out that the Falcated Duck is vagrant to Gujarat. There are only two known previous record of this species from Gujarat; the first record was by H. H. Maharao Vijayrajji of Kachchh, who shot a bird in February 1932 in Kachchh (Vijayrajji 1932) and the second record was in Khijadia Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar, in December 1984 when six individuals – three males and three females – were seen (Natarajan & Akhtar 1988).

We visited this site several times to check for the presence of the Falcated Duck, but we did not succeed in finding it again. So, it is possible that this individual had left the place. The Falcated Duck is a 'Near Threatened' species, which is thought to be declining moderately (BirdLife International 2018). This is the first photographic record of the Falcated Duck from Gujarat.

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## A second sighting of Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus* from Nal Sarovar

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Rajni Trivedi

On 22 December 2017, I was bird watching in Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, with local guide Kasam Sama. At around 08:30 hrs in the morning, we were able to see and photograph an *Acrocephalus* sp. warbler. This individual had a rather large bill and was small sized. I was able to take four good photographs which showed the bird from all angles. Based on the smaller size and different structure, I was able to eliminate Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*), which is much larger than the individual I saw. I thought that this could be a Large-billed Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus orinus*) since the bill was much longer than what is usually seen in a Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*). I had seen a Large-billed Reed Warbler earlier in Nal Sarovar (Trivedi & Ganpule 2016), and hence was aware of the possibility of its occurrence again in this area.

After coming home, I saw the images on my computer and thought that this individual was most probably a Large-billed Reed Warbler. However, since the identification is difficult, I shared the images with senior birders here and finally, the identification was confirmed as a Large-billed Reed Warbler. This is the second record of a Large-billed Reed Warbler from Nal Sarovar and the third record for Gujarat.

[As detailed earlier in Trivedi & Ganpule (2016) and Maheria et al. (2018), the identification of Large-billed Reed Warbler and its separation from Blyth's Reed Warbler is often quite difficult. Like in the previous instances, we again sent the images to Lars Svensson for confirmation and he replied (in litt., email dated 17 May 2018) that, "the bird you asked me about simply must be another Large-billed Reed Warbler. When I compare bill length with tarsus

length, both of which can be fairly accurately estimated on some of the images you sent me, the bill length far exceeds what could be possible for a Blyth's Reed Warbler. I think you can safely publish it as *A. orinus*. It is a slightly more darkly pigmented bird than most, but such birds are documented and not un-typical. This explains the dark smudge on the outer part of the lower mandible (which can similarly be seen on the bird Philip Round trapped in Thailand) and the rather darkish tarsi. All are within the normal variation as we know it for this species. Do you have a suitable swamp in Gujarat where the species could have a regular wintering range? Then you should make a targeted trapping survey there next winter. Or do you think the species moves further south in India before stopping to spend the winter?"

As explained here, there remains no doubt regarding the identification of this individual. It is interesting to note that this is the second record of a Large-billed Reed Warbler from Nal Sarovar. As suggested, it will be interesting to have a targeted trapping survey in this area to look for this species and since the sanctuary does have a habitat suitable (a swampy area), it is quite possible that this could yield positive results. It is also possible that the species could be moving further south in the winter but there are no records till date from any of the southern states. But, it should be noted that an earlier record from Vansada National Park, which is south-east from this area, is known for Gujarat (Maheria et al. 2018). So, only further records (photographic or by trapping) can confirm if the Large-billed Reed Warbler is a regular winter migrant to Nal Sarovar or whether it moves to southern parts of the country in the winter. It is urged that ornithologists / organisations like BNHS undertake the task of targeted trapping in Nal Sarovar at the earliest.

We are very grateful to Lars Svensson for confirming the identification – Eds]

### Acknowledgements

I thank Kasam Sama for helping me with the logistics and for his company in the field.

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